DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 540 UD 035 719

AUTHOR	Mudrey-Camino, Renee
TITLE	The Educational Isolation of Sexual Minority Youth.
PUB DATE	2002-10-17
NOTE	37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Columbus, Ohio, October 16-19, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bisexuality; Elementary Secondary Education; Homophobia ; *Homosexuality; Knowledge Level; *Minority Groups; *Preservice Teachers; Racial Differences; Sexual Harassment; *Sexual Orientation; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Sexual minority youth (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning) function in a society that condones homophobia. Results of a research study conducted by J. Sears (1991) indicated that teachers often expressed that they should be more proactive, supportive, and committed to the welfare of all their students, but the realities of their professional intervention and support for homosexual students were quite different. This study examined the personal beliefs of 200 preservice educators from the Midwest about homosexuality and how these attitudes and feelings are actualized in the schools. Findings suggest that this sample differed little from the sample of the 1991 study. Preservice teachers in this study did obtain a higher percentage of correct answers when tested on their knowledge of homosexuality, which suggests that though becoming better educated on issues surrounding homosexuality, these future teachers did not incorporate this knowledge into their personal attitudes and feelings. While black preservice teachers and early childhood preservice teachers obtained higher mean scores on both attitudinal measures (attitudes toward homosexuality and index of homophobia), race was the only variable that proved to be statistically significant. The paper also discusses implications for future research. (Contains 1 figure, 6 tables, and 42 references.) (SLD)

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The Educational Isolation of Sexual Minority Youth

Reneé Mudrey-Camino

Cleveland State University

Paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Columbus, OH

October 17, 2002

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The Educational Isolation of Sexual Minority Youth

Abstract

Sexual minority youth (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning youth) must function in a society that condones homophobia. Rendered invisible through the stigma attached to their identification as sexual minorities, they are conveniently forgotten by the institutions charged with facilitating their education. In a research study conducted by Sears (1991), results indicated that teachers often expressed that they should be more proactive and supportive and committed to the welfare of all of their students. However, the realities of their professional intervention and support were negligible. The purpose of this research study is to examine the personal beliefs of preservice educators from the Midwest about homosexuality, and how these attitudes and feelings are actualized in the schools. Findings suggest that the results of the current sample had little variation from the original sample. While Black preservice educators as well as early childhood preservice educators obtained higher mean scores on both attitudinal measures (Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Index of Homophobia), race was the only variable which proved to be statistically significant. Implications for future research are also discussed as a result of this study.

Within our society, many people have been taught to believe Gays and Lesbians are easily identifiable. The reality is, however, there is an invisible Gay and Lesbian minority population in every school. Further, the needs of these students are often unknown and unmet within the educational setting (Kissen, 1991). Youth struggling with gender and sexual orientation are reported to comprise ten percent of our youth population yet they may often go unknown to teachers and other school personnel (Little, 2001). These adolescents face unique challenges in developing their identity and gaining social acceptance. According to Shelby (1998):

> While educational systems and communities have come far in accommodating individuals with physical challenges, and increasingly, cognitive and emotional challenges, we are still lagging in support for a population that makes up approximately ten percent of our schools and communities: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning youth. (p. 100)

Purpose of Study

Sears (1991) suggests that sexual minority youth are thought to be perhaps the most underserved of all students in our school systems. With this in mind, it is not surprising that many sexual minority youth continue to face academic problems such as lower grades when compared to their heterosexual peers. In a research study conducted by Sears (1991), results indicated that teachers often expressed that they should be more proactive and supportive as professionals committed to the welfare of all of their students. However, the realities of their professional intervention and support were negligible. This research hopes to expand upon findings observed by Sears' (1991). Where preservice (prospective) educators from the Midwest will be examined on their personal beliefs about homosexuality, and how these attitudes may be actualized in the schools. Results from this study will then be compared with results reported by Sears (1991) to determine knowledge gains, attitude differences, and perceptions of homosexuality.

Objectives/Research Questions

The results of this study should provide information on whether statistically significant differences exist among racial, gender, and teaching certification groups of preservice teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward homosexuality.

Several research questions have been formulated for the purpose of this study. These include:

1. Is there a relationship between preservice teachers' attitudes about homosexuality and their race, gender, and type of teaching certification?

2. Is there a significant relationship between preservice teachers' exposure to homosexuality during their high school experience and their current feelings toward lesbians and gay men?
3. Are there significant differences among preservice teachers' race, gender, and certification and their current knowledge about homosexuality?
4. Are there significant differences between the results obtained by Sears (1991) and the current research findings of this study?

Significance of Study

Historically, when the nation's school systems have been made aware of minority needs, there has been a positive response in addressing these needs through changes in policies, curricula, and staff development. Currently, a small percentage of American school districts have taken positive steps to address the problems associated with Gay and Lesbian students in the educational setting (Besner & Spungin, 1995). In New York City, the Harvey Milk School was established in 1985 for Gay and Lesbian students who were not succeeding in the New York public schools. Additionally, in 1997 the Walt Whitman Community School was created in Dallas, Texas to provide sexual minority youth the opportunity to complete high school while gaining valuable coping skills to live in a predominantly heterosexual world (Little, 2001). Although these and similar schools have been established throughout the country to address some of the needs of Gay and Lesbian students, they also foster isolation from the real world.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine the problems of homophobia, isolation, and identity development encountered by Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning youth in the educational setting and its effects on academic attrition, achievement,

violence, and suicide attempts. In addition, the role of educators and implications for educational settings will be discussed.

Homophobia in the Educational Setting

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning youth (which in this paper will be referred to as sexual minority youth) must function in a society that condones homophobia. This societal norm directly threatens their physical, mental and emotional health and development (Little, 2001). Homophobia is defined as the "widespread irrational fear and intolerance toward homosexuality" (Lipps, 1988, p. 167). Like racism and sexism, homophobia can be subtle or overt. Harassment is not limited to name-calling. It can include obscene gestures, Gay bashing jokes, or finding nasty notes on one's seat or locker. Homophobia can also escalate to physical threats or actual violence, including sexual assault (Bass & Kaufman, 1996).

Societal attitudes towards racism and sexism have evolved becoming more accepting of diversity. Societal attitudes towards gender and sexual orientation differences are still largely intolerant. While homophobia is a structural oppression and not limited to educational settings, much of the harassment takes place during school hours and on school property (Little, 2001). According to Schneider and Travers (1997), "This makes openly Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual youth particularly vulnerable to victimization because they spend much of their day there since attendance is mandatory" (p. 51).

Isolation

In addition to homophobic threats, sexual minority youth may feel isolated within their educational setting. "The combination of harassment and invisibility leads to an isolation that feels huge and reinforces some students' beliefs that they are isolated at school" (Loutzenheiser,

1996, p. 61). Added to the struggles of adolescence, sexual minority youth must come to terms with their sexual and/or gender orientation without the supportive network many of their peers have. According to Brisken (1994): "When there is no positive mirror from which to reflect yourself, a distorted and ugly image is constructed" (p.4-5).

The social and emotional isolation experienced by sexual minority youth is a unique stressor that increases vulnerability and risk for a range of health problems (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Sexual minority youth must weigh the relative safety of isolation of remaining in the closet with the risk they will be met with negative response if they come out (Schneider & Travers, 1997). Most disturbing, isolation can be literally fatal. Sexual minority youth are less likely to seek support for fear of being rejected. Sexual minority youth are six times more likely to attempt suicide (Steinam, 1992), and are also more likely to succeed. According to Shelby (1998), thirty percent of suicide attempts by sexual minority youth result in death. As Meg Hickling, a well-known sex-educator, states: "homophobia is killing our kids" (1998, p.128).

The most recently well-publicized death was that of Matthew Shephard, a U.S. college student who was lured to a rural road, tied to a fence in winter, beaten, and left to die. Judy Shephard was quoted as saying: "Do I blame the two young men who murdered my son? No. I blame society for giving them permission" (XTRA West, 2001, p. 15). A frightening statistic indicates that approximately thirty-one percent of sexual harassment perpetrators, in the early nineteen-nineties, were under the age of eighteen (Harris, 1996). Ryan and Futterman (1998) suggest that most victims are not only sexual minority youth but also those who are suspected of being Gay or Lesbian, or who behave in ways associated with Lesbian or Gay stereotyped behavior.

The Safe Schools Anti-Violence Project (1996) issued their third annual report demonstrating results where over 8,400 students were surveyed. This report indicated that 95% of the students described themselves as heterosexual, 5% as homosexual or bisexual, and 4% as uncertain. Among these self-identified Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual students, 34% had been harassed because of their sexual orientation. Additionally, they were three times as likely to have been injured in a fight requiring medical attention than their heterosexual counterparts. They were twice as likely to have seriously considered suicide and they were seventy-five percent more likely to report feeling unsafe at school.

In addition, in 1999 a survey distributed by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Educational Network (GLSEN) revealed that ninety-one percent of the participants sometimes or frequently heard anti-gay comments in school. Sixty-one percent reported verbal harassment, 47% reported sexual harassment, 47% reported being physically attacked, 38% did not feel comfortable speaking to school staff about personal issues, and 58% indicated they did not feel safe in school. Sexual minority youth or not, teenagers and young adults receive a clear message that any association considered of being homosexual results in severe stigma, with potentially tragic results (Little, 2001).

Identity Development

Adolescence is typically framed as a period characterized by forming one's identity and developing intimacy with others (Erikson, 1968). Several developmental issues faced during adolescence are reflected in the following statement by Bohan (1996):

> The primary developmental task of adolescence is the achievement of identity, a sense of who one is, along with all this entails-values, beliefs, feelings, goals, skills, deficits, and sexuality, to name a few elements of this sense of self. A secondary derivative task is to

> learn to manage the social roles that accompany identity-to master, in short, the demands of one's particular place in society. (p. 141)

Sexual minority youth face many of the same challenges that heterosexual adolescents encounter: the task of moving from childhood to adulthood, the transition from family to friends as reference group, finding themselves as sexual and romantic beings, and making decisions about work and career directions (Morrow, 1997).

In addition to developmental processes shared by most adolescents, sexual minority youth are also in search of identities relative to their sexual orientation. Bohan (1996) suggests this process is extremely complex, in that, sexual minority youth may develop their identity without having had same-sex sexual experiences. In fact, young women may form a Lesbian identity based on affective, not sexual, feelings. Young adolescents may be more aware of being different from their peers than of being Lesbian or Gay. Clarity about this difference may not emerge until the end of high school or even later (Bohan, 1996).

To assist sexual minority youth with identity clarification, several theorists and researchers have proposed Lesbian and Gay identity development models (Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1981, 1982; Troiden, 1988). Typical stages include (a) a pre-coming out stage in which the individual is not yet aware of same-sex feelings but feels marginalized and different; (b) identity confusion, characterized by awareness of sexuality and internal conflict over identity, along with feelings of further alienation and isolation; (c) identity comparison or redefinition, including avoidance or repair attempts at elimination or explaining away homosexual feelings and behaviors; (d) identity assumption or tolerance, in which there is self-identification without full self-acceptance, which constitutes the first step in actually coming out to self; (e) identity acceptance, characterized by exploration, experimentation, and interaction with other sexual

minority youth; (f) identity pride, in which the individual immerses her- or himself in the sexual minority community and separates from the heterosexual community; and (g) identity synthesis or commitment, which involves integrating one's sexual orientation with one's overall identity and seeing oneself in the context of a larger culture. Minority-identity development models, including those theorized about sexual minority youth, arise from the need by individuals who come to terms with their oppression and marginalization (Morrow, 1997). For sexual minority youth, identity development demands that the young person deal with both the process of coming out and with encountering overt and internalized homophobia.

In schools, the site of the majority of adolescent social experiences, sexual minority youth may be receiving a substandard education because of discrimination and harassment, absence of role models, heterosexist bias in texts and teaching, and a number of other factors (Fisher, 1996). These factors can and often do lead to an insurmountable number of academic problems for sexual minority youth.

School Outcomes of Sexual Minority Youth

The theme of student invisibility has become a popular metaphor as more educational researchers are viewing schools as containing multiple realities in which some realities are defined out of the dominant social construction (Herr, 1997). The lived experiences of sexual minority youth in schools are perhaps the most elusive. Rendered invisible through the stigma attached to their identification as sexual minorities, they are conveniently forgotten by the institutions charged with facilitating their education (Durby, 1994). While discourses regarding diversity and multiculturalism gain ground within the school reform, the views of sexual minority youth are noticeably absent. According to Rofes (1989), "neither our school districts

nor the Gay and Lesbian community have made significant progress in addressing the educational and social service needs of these young people" (p. 450).

Actively ignored by educators (Sears, 1992), sexual minority youth are thought to be perhaps the most underserved of all students in our school systems (Durby, 1994). This sense of being invisible within the school has been well documented. Friend (1993) suggests homophobia and heterosexism are shaped and reinforced in schools by two interrelated mechanisms of silencing: systemic exclusion and systemic inclusion. Systemic exclusion is the process of excluding positive role models, messages, and images of sexual minority youth, rendering them invisible. In systemic inclusion, when discussions regarding sexual minority youth do occur, they are consistently placed in a negative context, linking homosexuality to pathology or dangerous behaviors.

As homophobia and violence toward sexual minority youth continue, it is not surprising that these adolescents drop out of school in disproportionate numbers (Herr, 1997). Though most sexual minority youth do not drop out of school, they continue to face academic problems such as lower grades when compared to their heterosexual peers (Little, 2001). Using data from the Add Health Study, the first nationally representative study of adolescents in the U.S. to include information on same-sex romantic attraction, Russell, Seif and Truong (2001) examine school outcomes (school troubles, attitudes, and performance) of same-sex attracted youth. Results indicate that sexual minority girls report less positive attitudes about school and more school trouble. The latter is particularly noted for girls reporting bisexual attractions. There is also a tendency for these girls to report lower grade point averages than their heterosexual peers.

The results indicate that feelings about teachers play the largest role in predicting the following school troubles for both boys and girls with bisexual attractions: paying attention,

completing homework, and getting along with other students (Russel et. al, 2001). Youth with positive feelings about their teachers were significantly less likely than their peers to experience the broad range of school troubles. Therefore, supportive teachers may help prevent school troubles commonly experienced by sexual minority youth.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Sexual Minority Youth

> When schools are at their best, all students are treated with respect and are provided with a high quality education that will help them fulfill their potential and contribute to society. That is what virtually every educator wants to provide. But because schools mirror the problems in larger society, this is not always the case. (Bass & Kaufman, 1996, p. 216)

The above quote is appropriate for two reasons. One, it acknowledges that most educators and practitioners act with integrity, not malice, when it comes to working with sexual minority youth. Second, schools do not operate in isolation from the greater macro system (Little, 2001). For these youth, this means that school based settings are not immune to homophobia and heterosexism, regardless of the intentions of its practitioners. In most cases, it is the silence surrounding the issue that is most damaging. "What schools fail to realize, however, that by not confronting homophobia, they are likely condoning it" (Loutzenheiser, 1996, p. 59). As with any area of cultural difference, teachers must educate themselves about diverse sexual minority communities and explore their own attitudes and feelings before attempting to teach (Loutzenheiser, 1996). This is easier said than done, as homophobia often implicates straight allies as questioning their sexuality themselves. Additionally, people in a precontemplation state do not want to change themselves, just the people around them (Brisken, 1994).

It has been documented that some educators experience difficulties in changing their attitudes and perceptions of sexual minority youth. In a two-year study, Sears (1991) examined the personal and professional attitudes of preservice teachers toward homosexuality and homosexual students. Findings suggest that 8 out of 10 preservice teachers harbored negative feelings toward sexual minority youth. Preservice teachers pursuing certification in elementary education were more likely to harbor homophobic feelings and express homo-negative attitudes than those planning to teach in the secondary schools. African-American preservice teachers expressed more negative attitudes about homosexuality than their White counterparts, but were no more homophobic in their feelings toward sexual minority youth. Less than one-third of teachers surveyed felt comfortable speaking with a student about his or her same-sex feelings or discussing homosexuality in the classroom. Forty percent of preservice teachers surveyed stated they felt it was acceptable to transfer a Gay or Lesbian student to another class at the request of a homophobic teacher. While preservice teachers knowledge about homosexuality was minimal those who were more knowledgeable expressed a lesser degree of negative attitudes and feelings (Sears, 1991).

Educators have a significant impact on the feelings and experiences of students. Students look to educators for guidance and exposure to information about attitudes, knowledge, and feelings. Students perceive teacher attitudes and feelings through teacher's verbal and nonverbal behavior. Sexual minority youth who are trying to determine teacher acceptance or rejection of homosexuality are particularly attuned to these cues (Besner & Spungin, 1995). Therefore, teacher attitudes may provide the validation for the student's self-acceptance or self-rejection.

Methods

Included in this methodological section is a description of the research design and data analysis, instruments, procedures, and participants. Additionally, the independent and dependent variables will be further discussed.

Research Design

The experimental design of the study consists of two dependent variables (outcomes), these are the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Score and the Index of Homophobia Score obtained from the questionnaires administered to the participants. The study considered several independent variables. They are:

1. Race: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Other students;
2. Gender;
3. Residential Location: Suburban, Urban and Rural;
4. Certification Area: Early childhood, middle, secondary, and K-12
5. Point in Professional Studies: Early, halfway, and late

Two analysis of variance (ANOVA's) were conducted to ascertain whether significant mean differences exist among attitudes toward homosexuality scores and index of homophobia scores in regard to race, gender, certification area, and point in professional studies. In addition, interaction effects were also analyzed.

Instrumentation

In order to examine preservice teachers personal beliefs about homosexuality, and how these attitudes may be actualized in schools, the participants were administered two attitudinal questionnaires:

1. The Attitudes Toward Homosexuality (ATH): a 30-item Likert-type instrument, designed to measure a person's set of cognitive beliefs about homosexuals. Item responses are based on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A total of four items were reverse coded on this instrument. Examples of attitudinal survey items are: "Homosexuality is unnatural," "Homosexual marriage should be made legal," and "I would not want homosexuals to live near me."
2. Index of Homophobia (IH): a 25-item summative category scale of a person's affective reactions toward homosexual encounters. Item responses are based on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Eleven of the 25 items were reverse coded. Examples of items are: "I would be nervous being in a group of homosexuals," "If I saw two men holding hands in public, I would feel disgusted," and "I would feel comfortable if I learned that my best friends of my same sex was homosexual."

In addition, the participants completed a 26-item Likert-type questionnaire developed by Sears (1991). This questionnaire contained:

1. Four items that related to their encounters with homosexual students as a high school student. Item responses were based on a "yes" or "no" scale. The following is an actual item example: "Did you ever suspect another student of having a homosexual orientation."
2. Fourteen items that were related to their knowledge about homosexuality utilizing a "true" or "false" response scale. One survey item is as follows: "Homosexuality is a phase which children outgrow."

3. Eight items that considered professional attitudes regarding homosexuality in the school curriculum, and projected professional behaviors regarding homosexual students were also assessed utilizing a six-point rating scale ranging from 1 (All) to 6 (Don't Know). An example is as follows: "To what extent were teachers supportive of homosexual students."

Participants

The data was collected from volunteer participants who were enrolled in educational courses. Most participants have completed at least 2 teacher preparation courses. Data was collected during the summer semester of the 2001-2002 academic school year as well as the fall semester of the 2002-2003 academic school year. A consent form was distributed to all participants within their educational course. They were instructed that their participation in this research was strictly voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time. The administration of the questionnaires and the total collection time of the data averaged about 25 minutes. Volunteer participants completed the above-mentioned questionnaires within their regular classrooms during regular class time.

The participants of this research study are 200 (144 females and 56 males) preservice teachers currently enrolled in a midwestern university. The racial characteristics of the participants are as follows: White/Caucasian (n= 158), Black/African American (n=26), Hispanic/Latino (n= 9), and Asian American/Pacific Islander (n=4). Two students reported "Other" as their racial demographic description. While the sample of minority students in this study is small, it is an accurate reflection of the student demographic composition in the education courses at this University. Demographic data was also obtained on the various licensures students were working toward, these include: early childhood (n=66), middle school

(n=40), secondary (n=48), and special K-12 (n=46) certification areas. A total of 43 students reported being at an early stage of their educational studies, 91 were halfway complete, and 66 reported being late or nearly complete with their studies.

Results

Index of Homophobia

As outlined by Sears (1991), the authors of the Index of Homophobia scale (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, p. 360) have determined categories of individual homophobia. For example, the authors state that scores of 0-25 evidence "high grade non-homophobic" levels. These individuals exhibit almost no negative feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals. Persons who score between 25 and 50 on this scale are considered "low-grade non-homophobics," and are those who exhibit a low degree of negative feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals. Persons who score between 50 and 75 are regarded as "low-grade homophobics" or those who exhibit moderate levels of negative feelings toward gays and lesbians. Those who score above 75 are considered "high-grade homophobics," or those who exhibit a relatively high amount of negative feelings toward gays and lesbians. In his research study, Sears (1991) reported modifications that he made to this scale. However, his modifications were not described in detail and difficult to replicate. Table 1 displays category results on the Index of Homophobia as reported by Sears (1991). Additionally, Table 1 reveals the results of Index of Homophobia for this current research sample and the percent of participants observed in each category. Twenty-six percent of the preservice students in this study obtained scores of 25-50 designating them as low-grade non-homophobics, 39% scored between 51-75 designating them as low-grade homophobics, and 35% of the preservice teachers in this study obtained scores above 75 designating them high-grade homophobics.

Table 2 describes the means for attitudes toward homosexuality for this sample of preservice teachers as compared with several groups assessed by earlier research. Sears' (1991) sample of preservice teachers obtained a mean score of 56. Goldberg reported similar results with a sample of college students. A group of Ohio high schools students were also assessed by Price (1982), they obtained a mean score of 60, which is comparable to the mean score of 65 as obtained by the current research sample. Possible reasons could be geographic differences in more conservative morals and values regarding homosexuality compared to Sears' (1991) South Carolina sample.

Analysis of Variances (ANOVA's) were conducted to determine whether significant differences exists between preservice teachers' attitudes about homosexuality and feelings toward lesbian and gay men depending on their gender, race, certification area, and point in professional studies. Tables 3 outlines the results of the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality instrument, whereas Table 4 outlines the results of the Index of Homophobia. Unlike the findings assessed by Sears (1991), differences were found with respect to gender with males receiving higher mean scores for both the ATH ($F=2.4$, $p>0.05$), and the IH ($F=3.6$, $p>0.05$) however, these differences were not statistically significant. Sears also observed no relationship between respondents' race and feelings expressed toward lesbian and gay men. The findings of this study do suggest a statistically significant relationship. As illustrated in Figure 1, for both the ATH ($F=5.8$, $p<0.001$) and IH ($F=4.6$, $p<0.001$), significant results were found indicating that Blacks scored higher on both measurements, followed by Hispanics, then Asians and Whites obtaining the lowest mean scores on both measures. While statistically significant effect levels were determined for the independent variable of race on Attitudes Toward Homosexuality scores, eta-squared ($\acute{\eta}^2$) were calculated to determine the adequacy of the ANOVA models as

indicated in Tables 3 and 4. The proportion of variance in the ATH scores that can be accounted for by this model is .130. As a result of these findings, it is suggested that the variable of race has significant effects on the outcome scores in the ATH.

In addition to early and secondary certification areas, middle school and special certification K-12 preservice teaches attitudes and feelings toward homosexuals were assessed in the current study. However, no statistically significant differences were found regarding certification area for either the ATH ($F=.283$, $p>0.05$) or the IH ($F=.119$, $p>0.05$). Additionally, no statistically significant differences were found for preservice teachers point in professional studies for either the ATH ($F=.085$, $p>0.05$) or the IH ($F=.015$, $p>0.05$).

Sears' Instrument

Preservice teachers were also surveyed on their high school experiences and to the extent in which their fellow high school students, guidance counselors, and educators were knowledgeable about homosexuality and the degree of acceptance exhibited. The frequency distributions of these responses are outlined in Table 5. Similar to Sears (1991), a significant proportion of the sample responded "Don't Know" to items regarding teachers and guidance counselors. Thus, indicating a large number of respondents were unaware of educators' and guidance counselors' knowledge about homosexuality or the degree of support for homosexual students. Sears suggests that the absence of classroom discussion in all but a few classrooms may explain why so many respondents could not assess the position of their teachers. Even though it has been 11 years since Sears concluded his study, time has not had any positive effects on the openness in classroom discussion of homosexuality as the participants in the current study indicated even more negative results. With 58% of the preservice teachers indicating that no teachers ever discussed homosexuality in the classroom. One interesting difference in this

current sample of preservice teachers as compared to the sample in Sears' study is worth noting. While the percentage of students knowledgeable about homosexuality was smaller (.42) as compared to Sears (.47), the percentage of students displaying negative attitudes about homosexuality in this sample was .55 whereas Sears' respondents indicated a higher percentage of .84.

Homosexuality Index

The preservice teachers were also surveyed on their current knowledge about homosexuality. The 14-item test developed by Sears (1991) was used which included questions from the natural and behavioral sciences. The response percentages are outlined in Table 6. Additionally, the results of Sears' study are reproduced in the table to serve as a comparison of the two samples. Overall, the preservice teachers of the current study scored higher on all but two questions. The question regarding the percentage of pre-adolescent males reporting at least one homosexual experience proved to consistently produce lower response percentages as only 42.5% of the preservice teachers answered this question correctly. Only 52% of Sears sample answered this item correctly. The second question regarding most adults engaging in neither exclusive homosexual or heterosexual behavior produced low correct responses for the current sample (28%) and Sears sample (29%). However, the preservice students in the current sample scored higher on several of the items as compared to Sears sample.

Individual scores were calculated from the 14-item survey yielding a Homosexuality Index (HKI) which ranged from 0 (lowest possible score) to 100 (perfect score). Black preservice teachers (M=54.4, SD=17.8) were less knowledgeable about homosexuality than their White (M=73.3, SD=12.5), Hispanic (M=65.1, SD=20.6), and Asian (M=71.4, SD=10.1) counterparts. As within Sears' study, females (M=69.1, SD=15.5) evidenced less knowledge

than males (M=73.0, SD=13.9). Additionally, early childhood (M=66.7, SD=17.4) preservice teachers were less knowledgeable than middle (M=72.1, SD=10.5), secondary (M=72.0, SD=12.2), and special instruction (M=71.4, SD=17.4) preservice teachers in this study. The preservice teachers in the current study obtained a mean score of 70.1 and a standard deviation of 15.1. The preservice teachers in Sears' sample obtained a mean score of 57.5 and a standard deviation of 19.5. As a result, the preservice teachers in the current sample appear to be more knowledgeable of issues regarding homosexuality as compared to those in Sears' study.

Limitations of this study do need to be addressed. Modifications were made to the instruments as reported by Sears (1991). However, these modifications were not apparent and not easily reproduced. As a result, I utilized the original Attitudes Toward Homosexuality (McDonald, Huggins, Young, Swanson, 1973) and the original Index of Homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) instruments. The lack of modification with this study may have caused the number distribution to be different and lacking in interpretation to make a significant comparison to the findings as reported by Sears.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to answer four research questions regarding preservice teachers attitudes and feelings about homosexuality and gay men and lesbians. The first research question I set out to determine was whether there is a relationship between prospective teachers' attitudes about homosexuality and their gender, race, and type of teaching certification? The results of this study suggest that a relationship does exist between prospective teachers' attitudes about homosexuality and gender in which the male participants did obtain higher scores on both the ATH and the IH. However, these differences were not statistically significant. Statistically significant results were determined regarding race and attitudes about homosexuality. Black

participants of this study obtained extremely high scores with a mean of 83.0 (SD=21.6), followed by Hispanics (M=76.3, SD=35.0), Asians (M=70.2, SD=23.4) and Whites (M=60.3, SD=22.1) obtaining the lowest scores on both measures. The type of teaching certification did not yield significant results for the preservice teachers in this study.

The second question I set out to determine was whether there is a significant relationship between prospective teachers' exposure to homosexuality during high school and their current feelings toward lesbians and gay men? While the percentage of students knowledgeable about homosexuality during high school was smaller (.42) compared to Sears (.47), the percentage of students displaying negative attitudes about homosexuality in this sample was .55 whereas Sears' respondents indicated a higher percentage of .84. One possible explanation may be stricter school policies toward the displaying of negative attitudes toward other students regardless of sexual orientation. As Little (2001) suggests, much of the harassment exhibited toward gay and lesbian students takes place during school hours and on school property. Fortunately, for these victims of violence, many schools have adopted zero tolerance policies and harsher discipline procedures.

The third research question addressed was whether there are significant differences among prospective teachers' race, gender, and certification and their current knowledge about homosexuality? The results of this study indicate that overall, the Black preservice teachers are less knowledgeable about homosexuality. Additionally, females tend to be less knowledgeable than males and early childhood preservice teachers tend to be less knowledgeable than their counterparts in other certification areas. As Sears (1991) concluded, while preservice teachers knowledge about homosexuality was minimal those who were more knowledgeable expressed a lesser degree of negative attitudes and feelings. As with any area of cultural difference, teachers

must educate themselves about diverse sexual minority communities and explore their own attitudes and feelings before attempting to teach (Loutzenheiser, 1996).

The final research question I set out to address was whether the results of this research study differed significantly than those of Sears (1991). It was rather shocking to obtain such similar results as those of Sears who conducted his research over ten years ago. The preservice teachers of the current study obtained a higher mean score on both the ATH and IH indicating higher degrees of homophobia within this sample as compared to Sears. The one interesting finding was the percentage of correct response on the Knowledge of Homosexuality Test. The preservice teachers of the current study obtained a higher percentage of correct answers on all but two questions of the test as compared to the sample in Sears' study. This suggests that while preservice teachers are becoming more educated on various issues concerning homosexuals throughout this country, their personal attitudes and feelings about homosexuals are not necessarily reflective of this knowledge.

Youth struggling with gender and sexual orientation comprise ten percent of our youth population, however, many of these youth remain unknown to their teachers. Therefore, educational needs of these students often go unmet. While a small percentage of schools are trying to make positive impacts on the lives of sexual minority youth, homophobia and isolation remain a threat to their mental and emotional health and development. Sexual minority youth struggle with coming to terms with their sexual and/or gender orientation without the supportive network of positive role models and peers. As a result, sexual minority youth are six times more likely to attempt suicide (Steinam, 1992) with thirty percent of all attempts resulting in death (Shelby, 1998).

Lack of support or acceptance by school personnel has resulted in a disproportionate number of sexual minority youth dropping out of school. Those who do not drop out of school face academic problems such as lower grades, lower attention levels, and problems getting along with other students. While positive teachers make significant impacts on the lives of students, many educators are not as accepting nor are they willing to assist sexual minority youth in educational settings. Loutzenheiser (1996) suggests: "What schools fail to realize, however, that by not confronting homophobia, they are likely condoning it" (p. 59). In a study of preservice teachers personal and professional attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual students, Sears (1991) suggests that 8 out of every 10 teachers harbored negative feelings toward sexual minority youth. In addition, only one-third of the teachers surveyed felt comfortable speaking with a student about his or her same-sex feeling or discussing homosexuality in the classroom.

With educators reluctant to even talk about the issues confronting sexual minority youth, it is unlikely that significant changes can occur within these educational settings. Educators have a significant impact on the feelings and experiences of students. Students look to educators for guidance as teacher attitudes may provide the validation for the student's self-acceptance or self-rejection. Little (2001) summarizes this point best by stating: "The challenges of youth can become the assets of adulthood, but for that to happen, sexual minority youth need support, role models and someone to accept them for who they are, not who they would prefer them to be" (p. 99).

Implications for Future Research

Until recently, little was known about basic developmental processes that impacted Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual youth, indicating that 'anything' seemed better than complete silence (Savin-Williams, 2001). What is largely ignored and in need of exploration are data that

document the daily lives of most youth with same-sex attractions. Researchers attempting to better the lives of sexual minority youth may address the difficulties these youth face such as their victimization and early death, rather than their strength and resiliency. Additionally, much research on sexual minority youth has assumed that only one type of homosexuality exists. Characterizing sexual minority youth as a homogenous group conceals the diversity within the group and supplies an incorrect representation of their lives (Savin-Williams, 2001). Therefore, I would like to further investigate the personal narratives and countless stories of sexual minority youth overcoming the odds in the face of adversity. While psychological implications have been drawn from various researchers about the emotional and psychological detriments facing this population, a large percentage of these students continue to overcome the barriers they face each day. As a result, high quality, quantitative and qualitative research would provide insight into this phenomenon.

Additionally, sexual minority youth vary among themselves based on particular distinguishing characteristics such as age, sequence of developmental milestones, degree of sexual atypicality, neuropsychological abilities, and social grouping (Esterberg, 1997; Savin-Williams, 1998). In addition to the lack of research on homosexual resiliency, the focus of sex differences among sexual minorities has been conducted on Gay males rather than female youths, though the results are generalized to young women. If research findings are going to be generalized to overall populations, the sample used to investigate these findings must be an accurate reflection of sexual minority youth.

Finally, within each sex, further subgroup differences need to be explored. As Savin-Williams (2001) so eloquently states: "As researchers we must strive to move beyond traditional paradigms to explore how sexual-minority adolescents are like all other adolescents and how

they vary among themselves. In this process their resiliency and their ordinariness will become readily apparent" (p. 11)

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Percentage Distribution by Category for Index of Homophobia Scores Among Various Populations

Population	<25	25-50	51-75	76-100	>100
Preservice Teachers (Current Study)	**	.26	.39	.31	.04
Preservice Teachers (Sears, 1991)	.03	.16	.44	.37	**

**Value not available due to modification

Table 2

Mean Comparisons of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Various Groups

Population	X Score	N
Preservice Teachers (Current Study)	65	200
Preservice Teachers (Sears, 1991)	56	255
Teachers (Fischer, 1982)	42	255
High School Students (Price, 1982)	60	278
College Students (Goldberg, 1982)	56	131
Guidance Counselors (Sears, 1988)	53	141

Figure 1. Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Index of Homophobia Mean Scores by Race

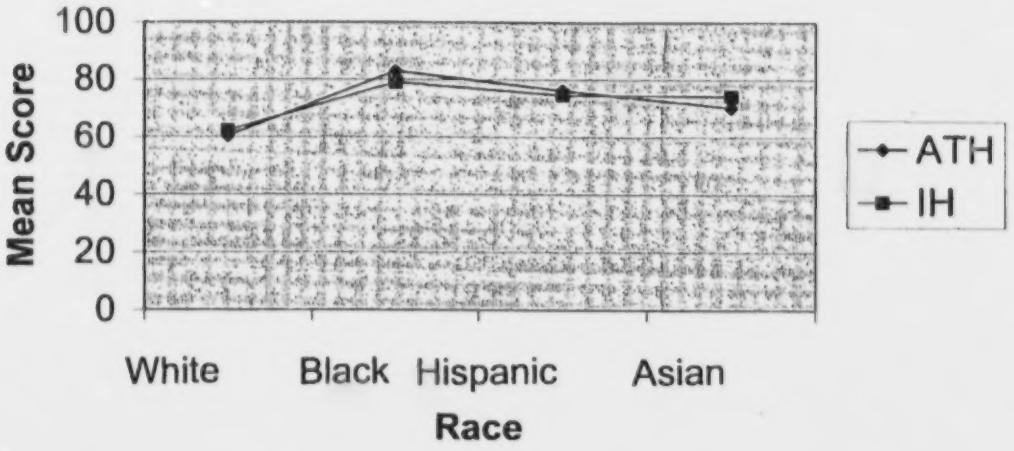

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Table 3

ANOVA Results on Preservice Teachers' Attitudes About Homosexuality According to Respondents' Gender, Race, Certification Area and Point in Professional Studies

Demographic		ATH X	ATH SD	F Score	Sig	η^2
Gender	Male	68.8	24.9	2.4	.119	.012
	Female	62.9	23.4			
Race	White	60.3	22.1	5.8	.000***	.130
	Black	83.0	21.6			
	Hispanic	76.3	35.0			
	Asian	70.2	23.4			
Certification Area	Early	65.5	25.0	.283	.838	.004
	Middle	64.6	22.0			
	Secondary	65.9	25.3			
	Special K-12	61.8	23.1			
Point in Professional Studies	Early	64.2	23.3	.085	.918	.001
	Halfway	64.0	24.6			
	Late	65.6	23.9			

***$p < 0.001$

Table 4

ANOVA Results on Preservice Teachers' Feelings Toward Lesbians and Gay Men According to Respondents' Gender, Race, Certification Area and Point in Profession Studies

Demographic		IH X	IH SD	F Score	Sig	$\hat{\eta}^2$
Gender	Male	70.1	22.4	3.6	.059	.018
	Female	63.8	20.1			
Race	White	62.1	20.4	4.6	.001***	.107
	Black	79.0	16.3			
	Hispanic	74.6	25.2			
	Asian	74.2	24.7			
Certification Area	Early	65.0	20.2	.119	.949	.002
	Middle	66.8	21.0			
	Secondary	66.3	21.0			
	Special K-12	64.4	23.1			
Point in Professional Studies	Early	65.7	19.3	.015	.985	.000
	Halfway	65.3	21.5			
	Late	65.9	22.0			

***$p < 0.001$

Table 5

Percentage of Respondent's Assessment of Fellow High School Students and Their High School Educators Knowledge and Acceptance of Homosexuality

Group Characteristic	Approximate Size of Group*				
	All	Most	Some	Few	None	Don't Know
Students knowledgeable about homosexuality	.10 (20)	.32 (64)	.32 (64)	.15 (29)	.05 (1)	.11 (22)
Teachers knowledgeable about homosexuality	.11 (21)	.28 (56)	.26 (52)	.08 (16)	.05 (1)	.27 (54)
Counselors well informed about homosexuality	.10 (19)	.19 (38)	.21 (41)	.08 (16)	.05 (1)	.43 (85)
Students displaying negative attitudes about homosexuality	.06 (12)	.49 (98)	.34 (68)	.08 (16)	.02 (3)	.02 (3)
Teachers supportive of homosexual students	----	.10 (20)	.15 (30)	.20 (40)	.05 (10)	.50 (100)
Students considering homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle	.05 (1)	.04 (7)	.11 (21)	.27 (54)	.09 (17)	.50 (100)
Teachers considering homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle	.05 (1)	.03 (5)	.07 (14)	.13 (26)	.10 (19)	.68 (135)
Teachers discuss homosexuality in the classroom	----	----	.09 (17)	.30 (59)	.58 (116)	.04 (8)

*Percentages rounded to nearest decimal point

Table 6

Percentages of Response Rates on Knowledge about Homosexuality

Item	Correct Response	% Correct Response (Current Sample)	% Correct Response (Sears 1991)
Homosexuality is a phase which children outgrow	False	99.5	81
There is a good change of changing homosexual persons into heterosexual men and women	False	77.5	77
Most homosexuals want to be members of the opposite sex	False	85.5	76
Some church denominations have condemned the legal and social discrimination of homosexual men and women	True	91.5	76
Sexual orientation is established at an early age	True	74.5	72
According to the American Psychological Association, homosexuality is an illness	False	79.0	64
Homosexual males are more likely to seduce young boys than heterosexual males are likely to seduce young girls	False	85.5	58
Gay men are at least four times likely to be victims of criminal violence as members of the general public	True	75.5	54
A majority of homosexuals were seduced in adolescence by a person of the same sex, usually seven years older	False	70.0	53
Sixty percent of pre-adolescent males report at least one homosexual experience	True	42.5	52
A person becomes a homosexual (develops a homosexual orientation) because he/she chooses to do so	False	59.5	46
Homosexual activity occurs in many animals	True	48.5	40
Most adults engage in neither exclusive homosexual or heterosexual behavior	True	28.0	29
Sexual relations between two people of the same sex is a criminal act in most states, including OH	False	69.0	28

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